



Ailes, M. (2018). The Deaths of Kings and Political Propaganda in the Bruts Epitome of British Library MS Egerton 3028. *Reading Medieval Studies*, 41-58.  
<https://www.reading.ac.uk/GCMS/GCMSReadingMedievalStudies.aspx>  
x

Peer reviewed version

License (if available):  
Other

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)  
PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) will be available online via University of Reading at [https://www.reading.ac.uk/GCMS/ReadingMedievalStudies/GCMS\\_RMS\\_Archive.aspx](https://www.reading.ac.uk/GCMS/ReadingMedievalStudies/GCMS_RMS_Archive.aspx). Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

## University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

### General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:  
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/research-policy/pure/user-guides/ebr-terms/>

## The Deaths of Kings and Political Propaganda in the *Brut* Epitome of British Library MS Egerton 3028

Marianne Ailes

University of Bristol

Certain monarchs have gone down in history, or at least in popular memory, as 'bad kings'; for instance, among the medieval kings of England, we find 'bad king John' and 'weak king Edward II'. These are among the kings whose memory is preserved in a remarkable text, extant only in British Library MS Egerton 3028. This unusual codex from the mid-fourteenth century contains three texts, all abbreviated: a *Brut*; and two *chansons de geste* (*La Destruction de Rome* and *Fierabras*). It is one of a small number of illuminated Anglo-Norman vernacular manuscripts described by art historian Alison Stones as belonging to 'a special category of densely illustrated secular manuscripts made between c. 1250 and 1350 in England for patrons, mostly anonymous, who were particularly interested in historical, hagiographical and literary works in Latin and French'.<sup>1</sup> The narrative of the *Brut* is extended down to the time of Edward III and his expedition to France in 1338-39, at the beginning of The Hundred Years' War. There are 53 illuminations in the *Brut* section; of the last five, four show the funeral shrine or tomb of later kings, including the funeral procession of King John (f.61) and the tomb of Edward II (f.63). This article will explore how the treatment of the deaths and burials of kings in the *Brut*, the first text in the codex, contributes to political propaganda in the volume as a whole.

Foundation myths were of enormous importance in the developing nation states of medieval Europe; as Paul Zumthor noted: 'La société européenne, jusque tard dans le XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, apparaît obsédée par le souci de garder en perpétuelle mémoire ce qui fonde sa communauté'.<sup>2</sup> The heroic Trojan War was used to furnish both French and English foundation myths. The nation of France was supposedly founded by one Francus, another name for Astyanax, son of Hector. The *Brut* was one of the most successful narratives to come out of medieval England; it survives in versions in Latin, French (verse and prose) and in English. It tells of the exiled Brutus, descendant of Aeneas, who came to the island of Albion with his band of Trojans and took it for his own; it then follows the story through to the early kings of 'Britain', the island taking its name from Brutus. The myth was related,

---

<sup>1</sup> Alison Stones, 'The Egerton *Brut* and its illustrations', in *Wace: A Celebration*, ed. Glynn Burgess and Judith Weiss (St Helier: Société Jersiaise, 2006), pp. 167-76 (p. 167).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Zumthor, 'Le traditions poétiques' in *Jeux de mémoire, aspects de la mnémotechnie médiévale*, ed. Bruno Roy and Paul Zumthor (Paris-Montréal : Vrin-Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1985), pp. 11-21 (p. 11).

at some length, by the twelfth-century Latin writer Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*, a great con-narrative purporting to be history, written sometime after 1123.<sup>3</sup> The best-known version for modern scholars is probably the verse text composed by Wace, which was the subject of a major study by Françoise Le Saux.<sup>4</sup> It was this French version of this pseudo-history, composed by the Jersey author around 1155, which was to provide the basis for retellings and recastings in French verse and prose and in English. Wace's verse text lies behind the neglected version of the *Brut* myth found in Egerton 3028, a text so abbreviated it is sometimes referred to as an epitome. Like many versions of the *Brut* the author brought his text up to date, and thus provides us with a firm *terminus post quem* for the text of 1338, when Edward III left for France. The text tells us quite clearly that the current king 'ad grant guere commencé, Pur ses dreitures s'en est pené Encuntre le Roi de France en sa terre' (*has begun a great war, for his rights he is striving, Against the King of France in his land*, ll. 3263- 65, f. 63r).<sup>5</sup> If we are to take the 'en sa terre' entirely at face value then, as Edward advanced into France via Flanders, this would actually place the text as later than July 1339 when Edward crossed the border into French territory.

### **The Memorialisation of Recent Kings of England**

The deaths of most kings in this short text are dealt with briefly, even abruptly, with the occasional brief expression of sorrow (e.g. ll. 1719 ff – the death of Uther's brother, Aurelius). The 'comfort' offered to King Uther by Merlin – 'N'i ad del mort nul recover' (l.1727) – there's no cure for death – seems to sum up the attitude of the anonymous author/redactor. The king is dead; long live the king! Wace ends with the death of Cadwallader, the last British king. For Wace the end of the line of Brutus seems to signal the end of his narrative:

ci falt le geste des Bretuns

E la ligngee des baruns

Ke del lignage Bruti vindrent...' (ll. 14859-61).

[Here ends the story of the British / and the race of lords / from Brutus's lineage].<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of the Kings of Britain* ed. Michael D. Reeve, trans. Neil Wright (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), p. vii.

<sup>4</sup> Françoise H. M. Le Saux, *A Companion to Wace* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 81-152.

<sup>5</sup> 'An Anglo-Norman Metrical *Brut* of the Fourteenth Century', Ed. Vernon Underwood, unpublished PhD thesis, University of London, 1937.

<sup>6</sup> Wace's *Roman de Brut: A History of the British*, ed. and trans. Judith Weiss, rev'd ed. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002).

The continuator in the version surviving in Egerton 3028 erroneously refers to Cadwallader's successor, Egbert, as his son with the effect that it looks like an unbroken line. He then follows first the line of the kings of Wessex, with a fair degree of accuracy in the order of the reigns but with some generations missed out, including Alfred the Great: Egbert, Athelwulf, Adelstan, Edgar, Edmund the Martyr, Athelred the Unredy, Edmund Ironside.

Vernon Underwood, whose unpublished PhD thesis remains the only edition of this text,<sup>7</sup> comments that the continuator was 'either colossally ignorant or strongly biased', largely because of the missing monarchs.<sup>8</sup> He may have been fairly ignorant, or more probably he was following a definite agenda – which is to emphasise continuity. The fast succession and economy of narration means that there is only a little detail about most of the deaths of these kings though the continuation consistently tells us where the kings are buried. What is most striking about the narration of the pre-Norman kings, is the way a certain parallelism in the narration stresses continuity. The account of each succeeding king's death is similar to descriptions of the deaths of previous monarchs. For those who die peacefully it is often a variation on 'he got sick and died', followed by the place of burial. For example, the death of Edgar the Peaceful is described thus:

Icel bon reis enmaladie

Mult fu dolent si amye.

A Lundres ert ensepellé

Et od grant honur enterré.

(ed. Underwood, ll. 2967 -70, f. 57r – 57v)

[This good king fell ill; / his friends were very sorrowful] / he was entombed in London / and buried with great honour].

This can be compared to the deaths of earlier kings, such as the death of Vortyporus:

Maladie l'en prist, si morust ;

A Lundres ensepelie fust.

(ll. 2789-90, f 53v)

---

<sup>7</sup> An edition of the whole codex is in progress.

<sup>8</sup> Underwood, 'An Anglo-Norman Metrical *Brut*', p. 66.

[He became ill and died; / he was entombed in London).

A similar formula would be used later in the narrative to describe the death of Edward the Confessor:

Li roi Edward enmaladie,

mult sei pleignent si amye.

A Westmouster esteit enterrez,

A grant honur ensepelez.

(ll.3055-58, f. 59r)

[King Edward fell ill, / his friends mourned him greatly. / he was buried at Westminster / entombed with great honour].

The place of burial is given only intermittently in that part of the poem which depends on Wace, but in the litany of kings which follows it is given consistently. This largely formulaic iteration emphasises, by its very repetition, a sense of continuity which is interrupted only by the brief reign of Harold in 1066, who 'a tort ad la terre seisé (*took the land wrongly*, l. 3069, f.59v) though even Harold is 'od honur ensevelee' (*entombed with honour*, l. 3082, f.59v). The legitimate successor, despite his bastardy, is Duke William of Normandy, who is described as Edward's nephew. The relationship was more remote than this. Again, we return to the question of the author's apparent ignorance; legitimate succession is clearly more important to him than fact. The poet clearly seeks to justify the succession of the Norman Duke, although it is also worth noting that the term 'nephew' did not always mean son of a brother or sister, but could mean just a family member of the next generation.

Apart from the brief interruptions caused by the succession of Harold and the earlier reigns of Danish kings, the Normans are shown as the next element in a steady succession, this emphasised by the parallelism in the text. It is with the Norman kings that the continuator really comes into his own, as he apparently takes on the mantle of his predecessors, Wace and Benoît de St-Maure, whose *Chronique des ducs de Normendie* stressed the legitimacy of the Norman succession. Among the Normans the treatment of two kings stands out: King John and Edward II.

King John's reputation is well known: he is the archetypal 'bad king'. It is not just popular accounts and Disney cartoons which stress this. Serious historians from the nineteenth century on have

judged John as 'cruel and ruthless, violent and passionate, greedy and self-indulgent',<sup>9</sup> or worse. More recent historians have noted that chronicles were generally written by churchmen, and the Papal Interdict pronounced against John rather prejudiced the clerical writers against him. Our chronicler, however, defies the standard understanding. First, he accords John a longer narrative than many of the other later kings: 22 lines compared to 12 lines on William the Conqueror; 8 on William Rufus, 10 on Henry I; and 8 on Stephen – Matilda is not even mentioned (an omission which fits with his desire to show continuity). 14 lines are given to Henry II and only 12 to King Richard. The interdict is included in the account of John's reign, not brushed over, but told rather baldly and factually. If Pope Innocent is described as a 'mult... sainte hom' (*very holy man* l. 3158), John, we are told, 'son realme guie en bele manere' (*guides his realm well*, l. 3149). The final judgement at John's death is rather positive:

Mult sei pleignent si amy

A Wincestre esteit porté

A grant honor ensepelee (ll. 3166-68, f. 61r)

[His friends mourn him greatly / he was taken to Winchester / he was entombed with great honour]

The almost formulaic echoes of previous kings can be recognised here. John is included in the succession of Norman kings, the legitimacy of which is emphasised by the reference in each 'paragraph' to the fact that the new king was the brother, son or nephew of the preceding one. It may be that John is particularly memorialised as a counterweight to the high levels of contemporary criticism. The fact that the author incorrectly gives the burial place of King John as Winchester may not be as significant as it seems. Underwood suggests that this error is 'by confusion with Worcester', the actual last resting place of John.<sup>10</sup> This is not unlikely, but I would suggest the confusion is not the author's; the author is thought to hail from the West Country (see below) and it would be an unlikely mistake for any West Country author to make.<sup>11</sup> The assumption has been that this is an autograph manuscript. If, however, we posit instead that it is a copy, and bear in mind that it was not uncommon to abbreviate proper names where it was obvious what place or person was being referred to, then I think there is a sufficient explanation for this error.

---

<sup>9</sup> A.L. Poole, *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta*, p. 425.

<sup>10</sup> Underwood, 'An Anglo-Norman Metrical *Brut*', p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> On the argument that this is a West Country manuscript see Underwood, 'An Anglo-Norman Metrical *Brut*', pp. 18-41; while his linguistic arguments are weak (it is not possible to locate geographically different Anglo-Norman productions on the basis of language), his other arguments do suggest a West Country link.

The images in this codex very closely complement the texts. Underwood notes the way that the image follows closely the point of the narrative being illustrated, to the degree that the illuminations, which are found on most folios, are not positioned in the same place on the folio, but can be on any part of the page.<sup>12</sup> A manuscript closely related to the Egerton codex, Hannover Landesbibliothek IV 578, contains the other two texts, *La Destruction de Rome* and *Fierabras*, in their longer, unabbreviated forms; its illuminations follow largely the same pattern as those of the Egerton codex. Underwood considers that the two manuscripts came from the same workshop (a hypothesis which also undermines the likelihood that this is an autograph manuscript), although the actual execution of their images is quite different.<sup>13</sup> The Egerton illuminator adapted his images intelligently to follow the abbreviated texts they accompany. We need, therefore, to take the illuminations seriously as a reading of the texts, though in the case of the *Brut* we have no point of comparison in the Hannover manuscript.<sup>14</sup> Because of the economy of narration there are only a few illuminations of the Norman kings in the Egerton *Brut*— but one of these is of the funeral procession of King John. There is a cluster of illuminations depicting the deaths of kings toward the end of the *Brut* section: the death of Athelstan (f. 57), the shrine of Edward the Confessor (f. 59), the funeral procession of King John (f. 61), and the tomb of Edward II. The place of King John here is notable. It is different from the others in that it shows the funeral procession rather than a tomb or shrine. There is, moreover, a resemblance between his bier and the shrine of Edward the Confessor: each has a diapered roof with red flowers in the diamonds and decorated finials. This may just be how the illuminator draws a casket, but even so, John is in illustrious company in death.

In that same company was also the ‘weak king’ Edward II. Seymour Phillips summed up the common perception of Edward II in his biography of that much criticised monarch: ‘The general opinion of Edward II [he tells us] from his own day to the present has been that he was a failure: as a king he was incompetent and neglectful of his duties, leaving the business of government to ill-chosen and self-serving councillors; and as a man he had a fatal ability to create enemies...’.<sup>15</sup> Yet our text gives more space to his death and resurrection than to any other king among the many enumerated in the narrative. Moreover, only three tombs of monarchs appear in the illuminations of our manuscript: those of Athelstan, Edward the Confessor and Edward II. In fact, not only is Edward’s death accorded

---

<sup>12</sup> Underwood, ‘An Anglo-Norman Metrical *Brut*’, pp. 10- 11.

<sup>13</sup> Underwood, ‘An Anglo-Norman Metrical *Brut*’, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Underwood (‘An Anglo-Norman Metrical *Brut*’, pp. 16-17) considers the possibility that Hannover Landesbibliothek IV 578 may have once also had a *Brut* at the beginning of the codex or of its immediate source. There is no evidence to suggest this. Underwood refers to the fact that one of the continental manuscripts of *Fierabras* also contains a fragment of a *Brut* – but this particular manuscript (Paris, BnF f. fr. 12603) is a mixed one with a number of other texts included.

<sup>15</sup> Seymour Phillips, *Edward II*, Yale English Monarchs (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) p. 5.

a special space – so is his life: 50 lines are dedicated to Edward, more than twice the 20 lines given to his more illustrious father. Edward II is described as ‘de grant poestis’ (l. 3211, f.62r); his generosity to the church is praised (perhaps a hint that our unknown chronicler was a churchman). His account of Edward’s downfall is factually accurate: he describes the conflict between Edward and his barons over the king’s favourite, Hugh Despenser. He is at his most vehement when describing the death of this king:

Puis par un Conte de la terre

Ke l’em appelleit Rogier Mortimer,

Li surdit mult grant huntage.

Cil li tolli sun heritage,

C’il fist Sir Hugh occire,

Et a vile huntage decoler.

Puis le Roi par force prist,

Al chastel de Berche le tramist:

A vile mort le fist morir,

Et vileinement li fust mourdrir.

Vint anz fu Reis poestis,

Et qant fu mort et fenis

A Gloucestre esteit porté,

A grant honure ensevelee.

Dieu l’ad grandement honoré,

Car meint home ad deliveré

De la langure qe li teneit :

Dieuz pur li granz miracles ad fait.

(ll. 3241-3258, f. 63r.)



[Then through a count of the land, called Roger Mortimer, he was slandered to his great shame. He took from him his inheritance; he had Lord Hugh beheaded. Then he took the king by force and sent him to the castle of Berkeley; he had him die a shameful death, and shamefully had him murdered. He was a powerful king for twenty years and when he was dead and gone he was taken to Gloucester and buried with great honour. God honoured him greatly for He healed many men from illness; God carried out great miracles for him.]

Note here the emotive language: *huntage* (ll.3243, 3246); *vile mort* (l. 3249), *vileinement* (l. 3250) – and then the contrasting terms used in respect of his burial: *honur* (l. 3254); *honoré* (l.3255). It has already been shown that the chronicler uses parallelism in his descriptions of the deaths and burials of the late Saxon kings to suggest a regular succession. Here he evokes particularly Edward II's father. A parallel between them is already established by the use of chiasmic structures at the beginning of the paragraphs devoted to each king. Edward I's begins:

Apres li regna sun fiz,

Edward...(ll. 3189-90, f. 61v.)

[After him reigned his son / Edward...].

While that of Edward II begins:

Edward, sun fiz, apres regnast (l. 3209, f. 62r.)

[(Edward, his son, reigned after...]

Both kings are then described in similar terms: Edward I 'esteit poestiz' (*was powerful* l. 3190), while Edward II 'fu de grant poestis' (*was of great power* l. 3211). Only one other Norman king is given the epithet 'poestis' – and that is King Richard. The manner of the death of the two Edwards could not have contrasted more. Edward I died, according to this text, In London, of an illness:<sup>16</sup>

Illec par maledie languist

Et morut cum dieu vousist' (ll. 3205-6, f. 62r.)

[There he lay ill and died, as God ordained],

while his son, as we have seen, was vilely murdered with God having little to do with his death.

When it comes to memorialising the kings, however, both are treated with great honour. Here God

---

<sup>16</sup> He actually died near Carlisle, see Michael Prestwich, *Edward I* (London: Methuen, 1988), pp. 556-57.

does have his place, for Edward II is now honoured by Him; Edward I is 'ensevelee ... pur solempnité' at Westminster (*entombed with solemnity* ll. 3206-7), while his son is 'ensevelee' 'a grant honore' (*entombed with great honour* ll. 3253-54) in Gloucester. The accompanying image (f. 63r.; fig 1)<sup>17</sup> also suggests parallels with that other saintly Edward, Edward the Confessor (image f. 59), though visually perhaps even more so to Athelstan (f. 57), who like both Edwards, fought against the Scots.

A study of Edward's monument has considered the illuminations in Egerton 3028 and concludes that 'this remarkable drawing is clearly diagrammatic...but is a close enough representation to suggest that the artist had viewed the tomb'.<sup>18</sup> The codex is even proposed as evidence that the monument, erected by Edward III for his father, must have been complete by 1340. The date of 1340 for the codex is, however, based on the assumption that this is an autograph manuscript.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, while it may well be that the illuminator had seen the sepulchre of Edward II in Gloucester – and the art historians argue that the 'lower tier [of the canopy] is perhaps indicated by the cusped ogee arch carefully drawn around the king's head' –<sup>20</sup> the internal visual echoes within the codex may be more significant. We have noted that throughout the chronicle is keen to emphasise continuity, and there are other elements of the illuminations which create a sense of unity across the whole codex. Both the other texts in the manuscript open with a full page illumination of a central figure, namely Charlemagne and Fierabras (ff. 83v. and 63v; fig 2). Unfortunately the codex is acephalous so we cannot know if the *Brut* was also preceded with such a miniature, but it seems likely. The ogee arch around Edward recalls the arches which surmount the images of both Fierabras and Charlemagne – and may well have been a visual link, not only with these figures, but also with Brutus himself.

To understand the way Edward is so commemorated here we have to turn to the political and historiographical context. Underwood considers this to be, most probably, an autograph manuscript of the abbreviated *Brut*. This would, therefore, suggest the dating he gives of around 1338-39 for the copying of the manuscript, before the great naval Battle of Sluys in July 1340, a battle not mentioned in our text.<sup>21</sup> However, we know it is not an autograph manuscript of the abbreviated *Destruction de Rome* and *Fierabras* as there exists a Middle English text, the *Sowdon of Babylon*

---

<sup>17</sup> The image clearly refers to the tomb of Edward II, though the British Library catalogue describes it as the tomb of Edward I. See the British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts: <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=6654&CollID=28&NStart=3028>.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Bryant and Carolyn Heighway, 'The Monument: A structural analysis' in Jill Barlow, Richard Bryant, Carolyn Heighway, Chris Jeens and David Smith (eds), *Edward II: his last months and his monument* (Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society, 2015), pp. 54-55.

<sup>19</sup> See below for reasons for this assumption and also for reasons why it may be later.

<sup>20</sup> Bryant and Heighway 'The Monument'; on the monument see also Christopher Wilson 'Gloucester Cathedral: Tomb of Edward II', in *The Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400*, ed. Jonathan Alexander and Paul Binski (London: Royal Academy of Arts and Weidenfeld and Nicolson: 1987), pp. 416-17.

<sup>21</sup> Underwood, 'An Anglo-Norman Metrical *Brut*', pp. 5-6.

which combines these two narratives, using the abbreviated redactions as its source, yet certainly not copied from this manuscript but from its source. The *Brut* adaptor uses the same abbreviating technique as does the adaptor of the two *chansons de geste*, and the same level of competence in his versification, indicating that we are probably dealing with one author-adaptor.<sup>22</sup> I suggest therefore that it is not unlikely that this is a copy of the original, probably not very much later than his source.<sup>23</sup> This speculation opens the possibility that we are looking at two slightly different contexts – the immediate political context of the composition of the three texts and a possibly slightly later context for the codex itself. The handwriting would suggest that this could not be much later.

The contexts we are concerned with here, then, are probably the late 1330s – early 1340s, and a period of copying perhaps little more than twenty years later, if that. The differences in the political context are not many: Edward III was still on the throne in the 1360s. As an expression of his claim to the throne of France he had been using since 1340, as part of his armorial bearings, a version of the French coat of Arms – azure semé of *fleurs de lis or*. Even although he temporarily renounced this claim in 1360, following the Treaty of Bretigny, he continued to use the arms as a sign of his maternal ancestry. Perhaps in reaction to this Charles V of France altered his coat of arms to *azure, three fleurs de lis or* – a small but significant development in the propaganda war between the two great European houses that were at that time ruling over France and England.<sup>24</sup>

For many, possibly for our chronicler, the reign of Edward II was sufficiently close to have been within memory. Although Edward's critics were legion in his own time and in the aftermath of his death, the author of the Egerton *Brut* was not quite a lone voice. If, as seems likely, our text can be dated to around 1340 and the manuscript to no later than the mid 1360s then it was almost contemporary with the writing of Geoffrey Le Baker, of Swinbroke in the west of Oxfordshire. Le Baker died in 1360; his *Chronicon* was, in the words of Phillips, 'positively designed to prepare the

---

<sup>22</sup> On the abbreviation of the *Destruction de Rome* and *Fierabras* see Phillipa Hardman and Marianne Ailes, *The Charlemagne Legend in Medieval England: The Matter of France in Middle English and Anglo-Norman Literature*, Bristol Studies in Medieval Cultures (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), pp. 316-30.

<sup>23</sup> Amy Jeffs is preparing a PhD thesis at the University of Cambridge, 'BL Egerton MS 3028 and Illustrating Secular Literature in England, 1240-1340' in which she argues for an earlier date of the 1340s, on art historical grounds.

<sup>24</sup> Marianne Ailes and Phillipa Hardman, 'Texts in Conversation: Charlemagne Epics and Romances in Insular Plural-Text Codices', *Insular Books: Vernacular Manuscript Miscellanies in Late Medieval Britain*, ed. Margaret Connolly and Raluca Radulescu, British Academy Publications (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 31-47 (pp. 33-34).

way for a cult of royal sanctity'.<sup>25</sup> The final words of our chronicler about Edward II attest to a very particular tradition of miracles at his tomb:

Dieuz pur li granz miracles ad fait (l. 3258, f. 63r.)

[God carried out great miracles for him]

Nothing was done to begin formal canonization procedures until the reign of Richard II, too late to be relevant for this manuscript, but it does seem that there was a steady flow of pilgrims visiting his tomb and, no doubt, contributing to the finances of Gloucester Abbey in the process.<sup>26</sup> Most important, given the codicological context of this text, to which I will now turn, is the patronage of Edward II's son, Edward III, who seems to have commissioned the magnificent tomb in Gloucester cathedral.

The Codex may have been copied, as I have suggested, slightly later. It is unusual in combining in one volume narrative material about Arthur, found in the *Brut*, with narratives of Charlemagne, found in *La Destruction de Rome* and *Fierabras*. The foundation myth of Britain is thus connected to Charlemagne, whose legend could be described as a foundation myth of Europe. A link is forged between the texts with a reference to Charlemagne in l. 2912 where we read that Egbert, the first king in the extension to Wace's text, reigned at the same time as the emperor. In the next 'paragraph' we hear that his son Athelwulf took as wife Judith, daughter of 'Charlemein de France' (l. 2931), though she was, in fact, daughter of Charles the Bald (Charlemagne's grandson). This is not entirely unusual - the various Charles who ruled France were often conflated into the person of the greatest - Charlemagne - Charles the Great. One of the threads which runs through the whole of the earlier part of the *Brut* is that of the inter-relationship of the realms of England and France, and indeed the Empire. Marriage with a member of Charlemagne's immediate family could only strengthen this. Stones was the first to suggest that the codex linked 'the history of England and its kings and the beginning of the Hundred Years' War and France with the Triumph of Right - Christianity over Islam - on the Continent under Charlemagne'.<sup>27</sup>

Elsewhere I have argued that the heraldic devices ascribed to the heroes in Egerton 3028 demonstrate that the codex as a whole is supporting the claim of the English ruling dynasty to the throne of France.<sup>28</sup> In this codex, King Arthur does not bear his by now customary coat: *azure three*

---

<sup>25</sup> Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 22 and p. 602.

<sup>26</sup> Phillips, *Edward II*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>27</sup> Stones, 'The Egerton *Brut*', p. 169.

<sup>28</sup> Ailes and Hardman, *The Charlemagne Legend in Medieval England*, pp. 139-44; Ailes and Hardman 'Texts in Conversation', pp. 33-34.

*crowns or*, but rather the three lions passant guardant of England, thus visually reinforcing that sense of continuity which our chronicler is so keen to emphasise in his text. In the illumination depicting his fight against the ruler of Roman France, Frolo, that ruler is bearing the three *fleurs de lis* of the kings of France, as adopted by Charles V in about 1365. In the illuminations accompanying the other two texts in the codex, however, Charlemagne carries the *semé of fleurs de lis* coat as worn quarterly with the lions of England by Edward III. The heraldic devices attributed to these leaders, together lend visual support to the claim of the English ruling dynasty to the throne of France.

Can we from all this deduce anything about the identity of the author? For Underwood he was 'undoubtedly a cleric',<sup>29</sup> like most other vernacular chroniclers. While most churchmen were condemnatory about John and Edward II, our chronicler has a bigger picture in mind and is keen to emphasise their legitimacy and good deeds. The economy of narration Underwood compares to that of the Books of Judges and Kings in the Old Testament. He is concerned, Underwood notes 'with the succession; benefactions and burials of the monarchs, who are catalogued rather in the manner of the Book of the Kings of Israel and Judah'.<sup>30</sup> All of this accords with our analysis. He notes also an interest in, and knowledge of, events which took place in the West Country: the reign of Edmund Ironside; the importance of Glastonbury in the legends of Arthur; Hugh Despenser given emphasis rather than Gaveston in the account of Edward II's reign; perhaps most importantly the assertion that miracles took place at Edward's tomb in Gloucester. To this we might add the similarity of attitude between our chronicler and Le Baker.

## Conclusion

Seymour Phillips alludes to the political stance of the author of the prose *Brut*, which he describes as showing 'a bias towards the side of Edward's first cousin and inveterate opponent, Thomas Earl of Lancaster'; but he seems unaware of the Egerton *Brut* – though in this he is not unlike almost all other commentators.<sup>31</sup> This neglect is unjustifiable as the way Wace's text has been adapted, and, in particular, the section dealing with more recent kings, can add much to our understanding of the political upheavals of the period. The abbreviated *Brut* text in Egerton 3028 emphasises the continuity of succession, using rhetorical parallels to stress links between succeeding sovereigns. This is particularly marked in the manner in which the deaths of kings are narrated and in the use of illuminations to memorialise certain kings. Particular care is spent in ensuring a positive depiction of

---

<sup>29</sup> Underwood, 'An Anglo-Norman Metrical *Brut*', p.35.

<sup>30</sup> Underwood, 'An Anglo-Norman Metrical *Brut*', p.35.

<sup>31</sup> Phillips, *Edward II*, p. 12.

those kings whose reigns were often not marked by positive accounts in the chronicles – here especially John and Edward II. As noted there are some indications that the chronicler may have been a churchman and was probably linked with the West of England and the area around Gloucester.

Perhaps the most important lesson to come out of this study, however, is not so much how we may view particular kings, but how we read medieval manuscripts. The way we edit and publish texts is largely divorced from their codicological context. It is, of course, true that many codices are whole libraries – or at least the shelf of a library – and may tell us a great deal about what members of particular groups were reading; even if the codex is a medieval anthology it does not necessarily follow that the texts were read as related to each other. This manuscript, however, offers us a different way of reading a medieval manuscript, whereby reading the texts together changes our understanding. The political message of the Egerton *Brut* text must be allied with the structure of the codex, which connects the *Brut* and legends of Charlemagne, and with an analysis of the illuminations. In British Library manuscript Egerton 3028. The texts and images should, therefore, be read (and edited) together and the whole read as a complete codex.

## Figures



Fig 1 Egerton 3028 folio 63r  
The tomb of Edward II  
(c) British Library Board



Fig 2  
 BL Egerton MS 3028  
 Folios 63 v and 83 v depicting Fierabras (left) and Charlemagne (right)  
 (c) British Library Board